



The Gold Grinders



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Chapter 1 by Chris S Endres

The quiet in the early grey morning mists gave way to only to the creaking of each nervous breath, every warrior wearing standard leather/plate techbot armor. A stealthy hand signal passed from Command through the ranks meant it was time to reach deeper into these nearly impenetrable wetlands. Our approach toward the Fortress was strategic and daring, and fueled by more than a few stories of horded gold. We knew there was some risk that the gold was just a lie, but Command had been correct more than just a few times.

"They better be right..." muttered Blinsky. "Quiet Torch..., still don't know what sensory tech they got, don't go and blow this" I shot back. "Right Cap," he grumbled back with a shallow nod. A quick scan and I knew our tight thirty man unit was making good headway, though maybe not good time through the dark waters and thick mist. I suddenly remembered scalping razorcray from the rivers where we lived when I was a kid. The unit stopped to a man. Everything went completely silent.

The firelight was barely visible, it's subtle glow of orange in the near distance and faint morning light. Most likely a sentry unit. Damnit. The hope had been that this angle of approach to the Fortress was unguaded. No such luck. So now the question was if it was tech or human. Tech would be tough if it was advanced. Maybe lasers. "Fortin, Kern, low and slow... recon that target. Use Nano." "Copy that Cap" they both said nearly in unison as they both crept off toward the aura of the fire. Let the flies do the real work.

This was riding the lightning. The adrenals always brought that heightened sense of the nearness

of death. We all knew this could be our last mission. Yet none of us could imagine a normal life. We all shared a sincere gut level. This was our chance to make us. Didn't matter the souls we lost, we were too tough to kill. That's what we held to challenge the fear, and it worked. Hardly signaled through the mist. This was a good sign. Tech could have possibly traced the flies where men likely couldn't.

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Something was wrong. Ten feet out Kern fell straight faced into the water. Fortin completely ignored him and wasn't moving right. He was being loud and uncoordinated..., and slow. Kern was struggling to get back up when I saw it, blood in the water and grey flesh hanging from the neckline of his cracked faceshield. Oh shit, "ZOMBIES!" Hot and fast the flash and crack of the auto-piercers tore holes in our infected team. Damn it!

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